DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 473 697 PS 031 072

AUTHOR	Amwake, Lynn
TITLE	Kindergarten Transitions: How Pre-K Teachers Can Help. Program Services Paper.
INSTITUTION	North Carolina Partnership for Children, Raleigh.
SPONS AGENCY	David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Los Altos, CA.; Carnegie Corp. of New York, NY.
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	9p.; Additional support from Park Foundation.
AVAILABLE FROM	North Carolina Partnership for Children, 1100 Wake Forest Road, Suite 300, Raleigh, NC 27604. Tel: 919-821-7999; Fax: 919-821-8050; Web site: http://www.ncsmartstart.org.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Kindergarten; Parent Participation; Parent Teacher Cooperation; *Preschool Children; *Student Adjustment; *Teacher Role; Teacher Student Relationship; *Transitional Programs
IDENTIFIERS	Smart Start NC; *Transitional Activities

ABSTRACT

Noting that the transition to Kindergarten is a process rather than a one-time event, this guide will help early childhood educators--home caregivers, center providers and public preschool teachers--understand the transitions to school and consider steps teachers can take to improve children's transition and adjustment. Specific ideas and strategies for strengthening children's transitions to kindergarten and examples from Smart Start local partnerships are provided. The guide first explores how to achieve continuity during the transition and why this is important. Elements of effective transition are highlighted. The guide then lists activities that can be incorporated into the daily routine to involve children in the transition process. A similar list is provided for involving families in the process. A section on supporting transitions at the community level notes barriers to providing effective transition practices and lists effective strategies. Examples from North Carolina's Smart Start programs are embedded throughout the guide. The guide concludes with a short list of related resources and Web sites. (HTH)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 473 697
Early Care & Education
PS031072

KINDERGARTEN TRANSITIONS: HOW PRE-K TEACHERS CAN HELP

WRITTEN BY LYNN AMWAKE, PROGRAM SPECIALIST, SERVE
EDITED BY CATHERINE WOODALL, EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIALIST, NC PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Monica H. Dodd
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Smart START

building **brighter** futures

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This document will help early childhood educators (including child care homes, child care centers, and public pre-K) understand transitions to school and consider the steps teachers can take to improve children's transitions. Specific ideas and strategies for strengthening children's transitions to kindergarten, and examples from Smart Start local partnerships are provided.

What are Kindergarten Transitions & How Do We Achieve Continuity? Why Is This Important?

When we talk about "transition," what do we really mean? The dictionary defines transition as the process of changing from one form, state, activity, or place to another. If you examine this definition carefully, you see that transition is a **process**—not a one-time event. Transition planning and related activities should take place long before the first day of school and should continue on for a period of time after entering school.

Off to kindergarten! What an exciting time, but one that can also be stressful to parents, pre-K teachers, kindergarten teachers, and children. The move from pre-K to kindergarten is one of the most critical moves that a child will make. Early childhood experts agree that the quality of this transition can impact a child's successful adjustment to school.

Dockett & Perry (2001) differentiate between **"orientation-to-school"** and **"transition-to-school"** programs. **Orientation** programs are designed to help children and parents become familiar with the school setting and are characterized by the school presenting information to the children and families. **Transition** activities tend to be longer term and more geared to the individual needs of the children and families. They may include orientation activities, but orientation is just one part of a more comprehensive transition plan.

Often this major step in a child's life is not planned or well-coordinated. When parents, teachers, and administrators work together, the transition process is more smooth and all parties are likely to feel more confident.

In the *School Readiness in North Carolina* report, the Ready For School Goal Team states, "Transition to ready schools is about children and their families moving from home, preschools, or other types of child care programs into the educational system. Transition is a major milestone for all involved and a change that offers both challenges and new opportunities for growth." In North Carolina "ready schools" offer year-round transition practices that provide the necessary exchange of information and activities to create continuity as children move to kindergarten.

Efforts to help smooth kindergarten transition have evolved out of concern that abrupt change interferes with a child's ability to adjust. Processes need to be developed to make it more comfortable for children and families to change from one environment to another. One way to do this is for kindergarten programs to build on the previous experiences of the child; in this way, the child knows what to expect and will feel more confident. Similarly, when the new environment provides information and opportunities for parent involvement, there is continuity for parents.

Early childhood educators should make a continual effort to help parents understand the kinds of changes children may experience when they enter kindergarten and reinforce the vital role that parents play in this process. (SERVE, 2000).

Often the transition to kindergarten process is disrupted by myths or misunderstandings of what is expected of children as they enter kindergarten. Some examples of such misconceptions are that children must know specific information, such as a certain number of letters from the alphabet or how to count to 25, before they can go to kindergarten. The only true *requirement* in North Carolina for kindergarten entry is that a child be five years old on or before October 16 of the current year. Good transition practices will help bridge the gaps in communication between settings and will enable opportunities to share information so that these myths are dispelled.

Early Care & Education

Elements of Effective Transitions Include:

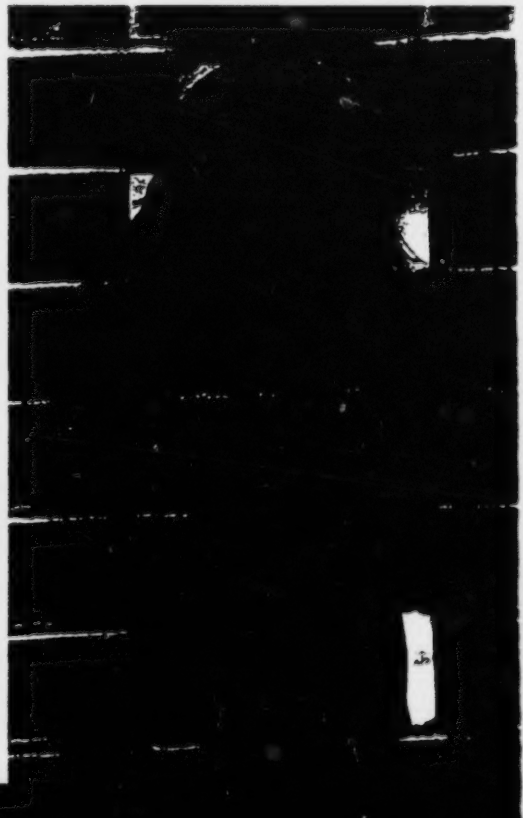
- All parties responsible for children's care and education work collaboratively in developing a written transition plan for the community.
- Transition activities are planned cooperatively for children by their families, care providers, teachers, and community representatives.
- Transition policies, programs, and practices reflect the diversity and uniqueness of children, their families, and the community.
- Developmentally appropriate practices (age appropriateness and individual appropriateness) are employed in all programs of care and education from birth to age eight to ensure continuity in assessment, curriculum, and instruction.
- A coordinated staff development approach is employed to bring together care providers and preschool and kindergarten teachers to discuss, learn, and plan.
- Parents and families are involved in the decision-making and are active partners in their children's care and education.
- A written community transition agreement is created, evaluated, reviewed, and revised as ongoing transition efforts are expanded.
- Ongoing leadership and advocacy for effective transitions are ensured by naming Transition Coordinators, representatives of each participating program/group, to work together over time to guide and refine the community's transition plan.

Adapted from It's a Big Step (1995). Bridging Early Services Transition Taskforce, Coordinating Council on Early Childhood Developmental Services, Kansas State Board of Education

Involving Children in the Transition Process

Although many parties are involved in the transition to kindergarten, children themselves are the most affected by the changes. The following activities are examples that can be incorporated into daily routines throughout the year to help prepare children for the transition to kindergarten:

- Teachers can read children's books about the changes and new experiences involved in going to kindergarten. Ask questions that involve children in problem solving about the situations presented in the books.
- As the year progresses, gradually give children additional responsibilities for classroom care.
- Encourage children to care for their personal needs. As children become more responsible, they should not need as many verbal reminders to wash their hands after they use the toilet or before eating. Hang visual reminder signs in the bathroom. Have tissues readily available so children can wipe their own noses. Allow children time to attempt zipping, snapping, and buttoning their own clothes.
- Gradually increase the amount of time children work and/or play independently and with peers.
- Engage children in interactive games that help them recognize their own names and learn to be responsible for their personal possessions.
- Arrange for a school bus to come to your program so that the children can take a bus tour and become acquainted with the role of the bus driver. Talk about some basic rules for riding the bus.
- Have the children dictate letters to the kindergartners at schools in their attendance area.
- Share your own experiences about going off to "Big School."
- Occasionally set up cafeteria-style meals or snacks. Begin by having children carry one item (cracker, cookie, toast) to the table.
- As the year progresses, gradually shorten naptime for the children and encourage them to look at books during this resting period.
- Create an "All About School" scrapbook with pictures of schools and various school personnel. Add to the book throughout the year.
- Encourage children to talk about any concerns or questions they may have about going to school. Be sympathetic to the possible enormity of this change for young children.
- Invite older siblings to share their entering school experiences. Provide activities and materials in learning centers that allow children to practice "big school" activities.
- Provide lunch trays and empty milk cartons in the dramatic play area.
- Have a party at the end of the year to celebrate everyone's successes. This can help provide important closure for children and parents.
- Talk to the children about what might be both different and alike about kindergarten and their current program.
- If possible, arrange a field trip to a local school. Having a chance to meet school personnel and see a kindergarten classroom will make the anticipation less frightening.



Involving Families in the Transition Process

Parents and family members need to be an integral part of the kindergarten transition process. Parents know their children better than anyone else - they know their fears and concerns, their strengths and weaknesses, and their likes and dislikes. It is critical that schools create a welcoming environment for families, consistently share information with them, learn from them about their child, create a variety of ways for parent involvement, and develop a system of shared responsibility. Some strategies that help support this process for families are:

- Invite public school personnel for a parent coffee or roundtable discussion.
- Invite some kindergarten parents to talk about their transition experiences.
- Share school readiness information with parents.

Smart Start of Mecklenburg County administers the *Bright Beginnings Community Partnership Program* for four-year-olds. *Bright Beginnings* has been accepted as one of the approved curriculums by the *North Carolina More At Four Pre-Kindergarten Program. Bright Beginnings* recognizes that parents are essential partners in their children's education. As a part of enrollment in a *Bright Beginnings* Pre-Kindergarten classroom, parents sign a contract that they will regularly read to their children, participate in school activities, and learn about healthy lifestyles.

- Reassure parents about their own concerns and help validate their feelings as expected.
- Share children's books about kindergarten with parents. Provide a list of children's books available at the public library or bookstores. Explain to parents how the use of children's books helps foster understanding and conversations with children.
- Make sure that parents get information on kindergarten from their child's assigned school.
- Where permissible, encourage parents to visit the kindergarten with their child.
- Keep parents informed of the activities you provide that help their child prepare for kindergarten.

Supporting Transitions at the Community Level

Early childhood educators and administrators describe a variety of barriers to providing effective transition practices.

Commonly expressed barriers and effective strategies

There is no forum for joint planning across the multitude of programs involved in serving children before they come to school.

- Survey the agencies involved to learn what they are doing to address transition issues.
- Form or join a transition team. Transition teams can be established at both community and school levels.

The Davidson County Partnership for Children formed a Kindergarten Readiness Team comprised of center directors, child care teachers, kindergarten teachers, school administrators, and home providers from all three school systems in their Smart Start district. This team worked together to develop a list of common skills they felt would be beneficial to any child entering kindergarten. Together the team established a set of appropriate methods or strategies that would promote the skills. These skills were not viewed as requirements for kindergarten entry, but rather as areas that would help ensure that children make a smooth transition. It is important to note that participants from all three school districts agreed upon the skill areas. In-service workshops will be held to provide training for all early childhood providers.

Children attend kindergartens in a range of locations and on varying school schedules, including year round.

- Throughout the year invite kindergarten teachers from several schools to visit your classroom. Use the transition team to create and promote a visitation exchange plan for teachers.

There is no consistent way to share information.

- Plan to provide numerous opportunities for interactions between the pre-K and the kindergarten staff.
- Develop a packet or portfolio that will follow the child into his new program. It should include samples of his work, his likes/dislikes and strengths/needs. Attach a photograph of the child and their dictated letter to personalize the packet.
- Provide joint training, where the staff from both early childhood programs and schools learn the same information and have a chance to get to know each other.

It can be challenging to keep up with all the different programs and resources that are available in the community. Programs are often isolated from each other, thus making communicating and working on common goals more difficult.

- Encourage regular communication via telephone or e-mail. Set up listserves for information about early childhood issues and happenings.
- Provide social situations where staff from various programs can meet. Host an early childhood educators party at your center.
- Create a mentoring system. To help build a stronger support system encourage pairing up among preschool and kindergarten teachers.
- Work with other community members interested in early childhood issues to host a community forum on early childhood education. Hold a poster conference where participants can illustrate their programs and community resources. Have program information, flyers, pamphlets, and other materials available.
- Plan joint activities to recognize the Week of the Young Child held annually in April. This is another excellent opportunity to share kindergarten transition information.

There are often few opportunities to speak to parents individually about the process of kindergarten transition.

- Hold a parent meeting early in the school year to address kindergarten transition. Explain that you will be sending home transition information throughout the year.
- Invite a principal and/or a kindergarten teacher to share information at a parent meeting.
- Send notes to parents regarding community transition activities, the need for kindergarten physicals and schedules for open houses.
- Call the local school system to inform them that you are willing to help disseminate information about kindergarten registration and public school events.

There is no funding available to support transition efforts.

- Share information with the community about the value of good transition practices. Community support for activities can sometimes be initiated by letting others know about a need.
- North Carolina has Smart Start funding for early childhood education. Check with your local partnership to see if there are projects in which you wish to participate.

Class lists are generated too late.

- Form or work with an existing transition planning team to advocate for providing placement lists as early as possible. Determine a way to receive class lists in the spring. Early lists enable pre-K teachers to help children become familiar with their new teacher and allow time for individualized joint planning between the two programs. Class lists also enable kindergarten staff to make summer contacts with the children and their families.

The Down East Partnership for Children provides funding to Edgecombe County Schools for their multi-faceted transition program. All children are eligible at age four for this voluntary program, and over 90% of the families in the county have agreed to participate at some level. One of the services provided is the Adopt-a-Preschool Program. Home/school staff members make weekly visits to all the child care and Head Start programs in order to share school happenings and to provide activities for the four-year-old children. Playgroups in the public school classrooms is another option available to child care programs and parents. The public school pre-K is a four-day program and on the fifth day the classroom is used for the playgroups. The public pre-K staff is responsible for planning and supervising the activities. Parents and child care providers are encouraged to participate as well.

There is a lack of knowledge about how cultural and language differences can affect a child's transition.

- Provide staff training around the issues of culture and home language. It is important for staff to realize that culture affects all aspects of a child's life: beliefs, values, spiritual practices, rules for behavior, communication, and ways of learning. For example, some cultures may expect cooperation and obedience within the group instead of competition and individual achievement. Other cultures may value creativity and artistic expression (Regional Educational Laboratory Network, 1999.) Invite community members and parents from different cultures to share photos, food, and customs at parent and staff meetings.
- If you have children whose home language is not English, provide materials in the home language of that family.
- Hire staff from the community, that reflect the cultures and languages of the children enrolled.
- Recognize that each home also has its own culture. How parents communicate, play, discipline, etc., will be different for each child.
- Toys, books and materials in the classroom should reflect the various cultures of the children.

It is essential that both early care and education providers and schools work together to overcome the barriers to smooth transitions.

Buncombe County Partnership for Children improved its early childhood cross-communication efforts by hosting a one-day retreat for child care providers, kindergarten teachers, school administrators, Head Start staff, health care providers, and special needs coordinators. Using a roundtable format for discussion, various topical issues were shared among the participants. This format allowed them to share and to learn about other programs, and to start building connections. After the retreat, a School Readiness Rally was held. In preparation for the rally, child care teachers and kindergarten teachers were paired as training teams. During the rally each team answered parents questions about school readiness, curriculum, transitions and how children learn through play.

Program Requirements for Transition Services

Because of the benefits that effective transitions provide, many state and national education programs are mandated to provide transition services to the families and children they serve. These mandated transition activities are especially important as children transition to kindergarten.

Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 stipulates that each district must prepare a plan for the transition of each child from Head Start or other early childhood development programs into kindergarten.

Head Start is mandated to assist children and their families move from home into the Early Head Start or Head Start program—and from Head Start into the elementary school setting.

For children with special needs, federal law requires that a plan for transition be included in their child's IEP (Individualized Education Plan) and that families be involved throughout the process.

Even Start is mandated to collaborate with other educational services and, as much as possible, with health and social service agencies.

In North Carolina, the More at Four pre-K program requires that:

- Written community transition plans are in place and revised periodically.
- A community transition coordinator is designated.
- Decision making involves families as active partners.
- Transition policies, programs, and practices reflect the diversity and uniqueness of children, families, and communities.
- Staff development is coordinated to bring together early care and education providers, More at Four staff, and other public school staff.
- Parents, More at Four staff, schoolteachers and administrators, and other early childhood and community providers, plan transition activities cooperatively.

Working together we can help children and families have a good experience as they transition to school. You can find out more by contacting your local Smart Start partnership or your school system. Some additional resources that might be helpful as you start working toward improved transitions in your community are provided on the next page.

Resources

SERVE. (1997) *Terrific transitions: Ensuring continuity of services for children and their families.* Tallahassee, FL. 800-352-6001 or www.serve.org/publications/ecttc.pdf

Wesley, P. W. (2001) *Smooth Moves to Kindergarten.* Chapel Hill, NC: Chapel Hill Training Outreach Project, Inc. 919-490-5577, ext. 242

Regional Educational Laboratories' Early Childhood Collaboration Network. (1999) *Continuity in early childhood: A framework for home, school, and community linkages.* Tallahassee, FL. 800-352-6001 or www.serve.org/publications

Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center. (1999). *Early Developments, 3*(1). 919-966-0857 or 919-966-0867 or www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl

Certain print resources are downloadable at the National Association for the Education of Young Children, www.naeyc.org/resources/eyly/default.asp

Continuity for Young Children: Positive Transitions to Elementary School (The California Department of Education). www.otan.dni.us/webfarm/transitions/continuity.html

North Carolina Interagency Coordinating Council or the Local Interagency Coordinating Council in your area will have resources related to children's transitions.

Local libraries have many magazines and journals that you can access to find activities and information about how to smooth transitions.

Websites

Smart Start, www.ncsmartstart.org
No Child Left Behind, www.ed.gov
SERVE, www.serve.org/Syc
Head Start, www.headstart.org
Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, www.fpg.unc.edu
National Association for the Education of Young Children, www.naeyc.org
National Parent Information Network, www.npin.org

This publication is made possible through grants from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Park Foundation.

North Carolina Partnership for Children
1100 Wake Forest Road
Raleigh, NC 27604
phone: 919.821.7999 fax: 919.821.8050

2003 North Carolina Partnership for Children

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

[X] This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

[ ] This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").

p503/072